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NEW YORK TIMES
24 APRIL 1982

Inman Loss Seen as Peril to Congress

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 23 — A conservative Republican member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence said today that the ability of Congress to act as a check on the activities of intelligence agencies had been imperiled by the resignation of Adm. Bobby R. Inman as Deputy Director of Central Intelligence.

Senator Richard G. Lugar of Indiana, who supports the Reagan Administration's drive to strengthen intelligence agencies and expand their operations, asserted that William J. Casey, the Director of Central Intelligence, did not know enough about the field to deal with Congressional overseeing committees. He urged President Reagan to appoint a professional intelligence officer to succeed Admiral Inman.

"There needs to be a person who has the confidence of Congress and knowledge of what's going on," Senator Lugar said. "We voted for Casey and Inman as a package — Casey because he has access to the President, Inman because he knows what's going on. We've trusted his comprehensive knowledge."

Mr. Lugar's comments added to the controversy that has surrounded the resignation of Admiral Inman, the first senior national security official in the Reagan Administration to resign for reasons related at least partly to policy disagreements.

Lugar 'Sending a Signal'

When the White House announced Wednesday that the admiral was resigning, it said that he had intended to leave Government service for some time to enter private business. Associates of the admiral said he was resigning because of a series of clashes with the White House and mounting frustration with the direction of the Reagan Administration's intelligence and foreign policies.

Senator Lugar, who called reporters to his office and pointedly told them he was "sending a signal" to the White House, said the responsibility of Congress to oversee the policies and activities of intelligence agencies depended on open access to information and trust in the officials who provided the information.

"We've looked to Admiral Inman," Mr. Lugar said. "He's been our man."

Concern about Admiral Inman's departure and the future course of intelligence policy is widespread on the Senate committee. Other members have echoed Mr. Lugar's worries in private conversations since the resignation was announced. Senator Joseph R. Biden Jr., Democrat of Delaware, said this week that when the admiral leaves, "there will be no one for us to deal with at the C.I.A."

When President Reagan took office many members of the committee, including the chairman, Barry Goldwater, Republican of Arizona, urged him to appoint Admiral Inman as Director of Central Intelligence. The Senators said they were impressed by the way Admiral Inman had managed the National Security Agency, which he headed in the Carter Administration, and had confidence in the information he provided at briefings.

Mr. Casey, who had been Mr. Reagan's campaign manager, has had a strained relationship with the committee since he took office. Last year, after investigating Mr. Casey's personal financial dealings, several Senators called for his resignation.

Lugar Served With Inman in Navy

Senator Lugar said today that he had a long-standing friendship with Admiral Inman dating to the late 1950's, when they served together in the Navy as junior intelligence officers. He said his concerns about the resignation, however, were not generated by the friendship.

"His departure is not simply a case of someone resigning," Senator Lugar said. "It is a watershed event."

Mr. Lugar said that the capacity of Congress to check on intelligence agencies was at stake because Mr. Casey lacked the knowledge to keep House and Senate oversight committees informed. Asked if he feared a resumption of abuses by intelligence agencies in Admiral Inman's absence, the Senator replied, "It's a lot tougher to step in when you don't know who to call to get to the bottom of something."

He added, "Bill Casey is a very able American who has made some pretty

good decisions, but there are complexities that would take more years to understand than Casey will be alive."

Kathy Pherson, a spokesman at the C.I.A., said Mr. Casey would make no comment on Senator Lugar's remarks.

Mr. Lugar said that Mr. Casey, while making an effort to become more accessible to the committee, was still not responsive enough. The Senator said that members of the intelligence committee had not received notification of Admiral Inman's resignation until the day it was announced, even though the admiral sent a letter of resignation to President Reagan in late March.

Senator Lugar said he was also concerned that to date, the committee had not been consulted about choosing a new deputy director. "We have to be in a little closer touch," he said of relations with Mr. Casey.

He warned that there could be a revival of the "underlying disquiet" that the committee felt toward Mr. Casey last year when Mr. Casey's finances were under investigation and relations between the intelligence chief and the intelligence committee reached a low point.

Officials at the White House said today that it would be at least several more days before Mr. Reagan picked a successor to Admiral Inman. The appointee would face Senate confirmation. Mr. Lugar said today that if the committee did not approve the Administration's choice, it would not hesitate to delay or deny confirmation.